

MORTH AYRSHIRE MONITOR FARM ANNUAL REPORT YEAR 2

Farm name Girtridge Farm, Dundonald, Kilmarnock, Ayrshire, KA2 9BX

Girtridge Farm is run by the business of Messrs John Howie, a partnership consisting of John Howie, his mother Margaret and his sister Mary. The business farms a total of 140 hectares of non-LFA land and 35 hectares of LFA grassland.

Livestock

Finished Cattle: Approximately 250 finishing cattle purchased through the local market all year round. The aim is to sell cattle at R4L deadweight through either Stoddarts or Highland Meats.

Sheep Flock: 344 Aberfield cross and Mule and Texel cross ewes put to Abermax and Texel cross tups. Lambs are sold finished both through the live market and deadweight at Scotbeef and Vivers. All replacement females are currently being purchased with the majority being Aberfield gimmers.

Cropping

Spring Barley: 19.32 hectares

Winter Barley: 7.70 hectares

All barley and straw is used on farm.

Forage: Two cuts of silage are taken with 7.13 hectares of hay also being produced.

The Management Group is chaired by Hazel Muir and includes John Howie, William MacTier, Andrew Welsh, Beth Errington, Gordon Walker, Louise Walker, Iain Reid, James Morrison, John Cowan, John Hunter, John Paterson, James Smith, Matt Mitchell, Philip Close, Robert Munro, Willie Campbell and David Young

MEETING TOPICS

The management group drives the direction the monitor farm takes and suggests ideas for meetings and try-outs for the host farmer to explore. Our management group remains strong at 19 members including local farmers, the ex-farm vet, as well as the Howie family and facilitators. The current management chairman is Mrs Hazel Muir, who works in the industry as a Quality Assurance Inspector and also works on the farm at home which has a suckler herd producing forward stores. Hazel is excellent at motivating and encouraging our monitor farmer John Howie as well as the community group. It is envisaged that Hazel will remain in post until the end of the Monitor Farm programme.

YEAR TWO MEETINGS SUMMARY

Date	Attendance	Aims	Outcomes
26/01/18 7 th meeting	34	Assess options to improve shed ventilation at Girtridge. Discuss new cattle handling facilities and precision farming technology.	John has begun altering the shed to improve ventilation input. John's cattle handling system is in practice and he is considering pairing this with EID performance recording equipment and software. A SWOT analysis was prepared to create discussion within the group and highlight the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats affecting John at Girtridge.
28/02/18 8 th meeting	21	Understanding the beef industry and the importance of herd efficiency and productivity. Lambing – best practice. Share FarmBench Data and discuss areas where John Howie is doing well and where improvement is required.	John is looking more at his costs of production. John recorded lamb information at birth, including the breed and birth weight, and related this to the tag number. He then monitored DLWGs and comparisons could be made between breeds. John has taken on board community group ideas going forward on where improvements can be made to gross margins.
08/06/18 9 th meeting	40	Explore soil health and compaction, the application of drone technology and crop management. Discuss grass seed trial and sheep flock performance. A breed comparison trial has been set up pre lambing and will be monitored until all lambs have been sold to compare the Aberfield and Abermax breeds benefit to the flock.	Being able to forward plan as dry weather is resulting in barley heading too early leading to reduced straw yield. Slurry analysed and fertiliser balanced accordingly. John Howie subsequently monitored grass growth and this revealed that there was a higher grass yield in the area that was sward lifted. A trial using foliar sulphur and amino acid on silage aftermath to encourage faster regrowth and boost silage quality was abandoned due to drought conditions. It will be picked up again in year 3.
15/08/18 10 th meeting	44	Exploring the use of EID Technology in cattle as a management tool.	EID tagging calves may become compulsory from 01/01/20. John is looking into getting a simple EID

		Assessing options for wetter fields including drainage and woodland planting. Explored planting options to improve the biodiversity value of the farm. Update on sheep and cattle performance.	recording software package which will help monitor performance. John has entered into an EID trail with Scot EID and has tagged two batches of store cattle with EID management tags on arrival at Girtridge. Grant funding is available for woodland planting under the Forestry Grant Scheme. However, John decided not to go ahead with the planting proposal. A total of 112 lambs sold so far with an overall average of 43.32 kg.
12/09/18 11 th meeting	40	Succession Planning	The group got the opportunity to discuss succession planning. It is best to approach family succession early and write down a time frame. Also review your succession plan often as situations and circumstances can change. Also review and update Wills and Power of Attorneys often. Heather Wildman of Saviour Associates consulted twice with John and family prior to the meeting.
16/11/18 12 th meeting	35	Cattle health including lungworm and BVD was covered. Liver fluke in sheep was also covered. Cattle nutrition and rationing including assessing the situation at Girtridge. This included assessing the ration, water availability, ventilation and overall shed stocking rates and their impact on cattle performance.	Improved knowledge on how BVD is spread and its implications on your business. Improved knowledge on wormers and flukicides and how to prevent resistance to them building up in your flock. Rations formulated for the finished cattle to drive an increase in DLWG. Water troughs have been installed and further shed alterations have been made to improve ventilation – these should help improve cattle performance. Cattle growth rates and intakes will be monitored to assess how the ration is working.
14/12/18 (Business Group Open Meeting)	22	Visit to Clonhie (Nithsdale Monitor Farm & Tibbers Farms, Thornhill. Looking at the sheep and deer enterprises at Clonhie along with	Successful diversification into deer at Clonhie. Sheep Te Pari Racewell with a 3-way autodrafter and extensive recording via EID equipment used at Clonhie aids management decisions.

		<p>comparing sheep benchmarking data to that at Girtridge. Also looking at the finishing system at Tibbers for ideas that would be transferrable to Girtridge.</p>	<p>The key messages from Clonhie were to invest in equipment, which reduces times and labour when possible, and to think about profit.</p> <p>Key messages from Tibbers were to communicate with others in the supply chain (e.g. store cattle producers) and use EID to monitor performance, make management decisions and select cattle to purchase in the future (i.e. purchase stores which have a proven track record to perform well on your farm). John is looking into a similar EID set-up as Tibbers with FarmWizard software as it is easy to use.</p>
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ATTENDANCE

Attendances have been strong for all of the meetings so far. However, monitor farm meetings cannot simply be judged on these figures; sharing knowledge and encouraging uptake of best practice and change at farm level are far more important. Feedback from the group highlights the need not only for relevant topics and good quality speakers but also for the meetings to be enjoyable and informal where they are comfortable to share their views.

- Total attendance for Year 2 Community Group Meetings is 214, with an average of 36 at each meeting (this is excluding the Business Group Open Meeting).
- Some prefer to attend all meetings; others will pick and choose by the topic.
- Reports are emailed to a community group list of over 130 people.

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

Raymond Crerar, Kirstyn Blackwood, Gillian McMillan
 SAC Consulting, John F Niven Building, Auchincruive, Ayr KA6 5HW
 Tel. 01292 525252 Email: frbsayr@sac.co.uk

